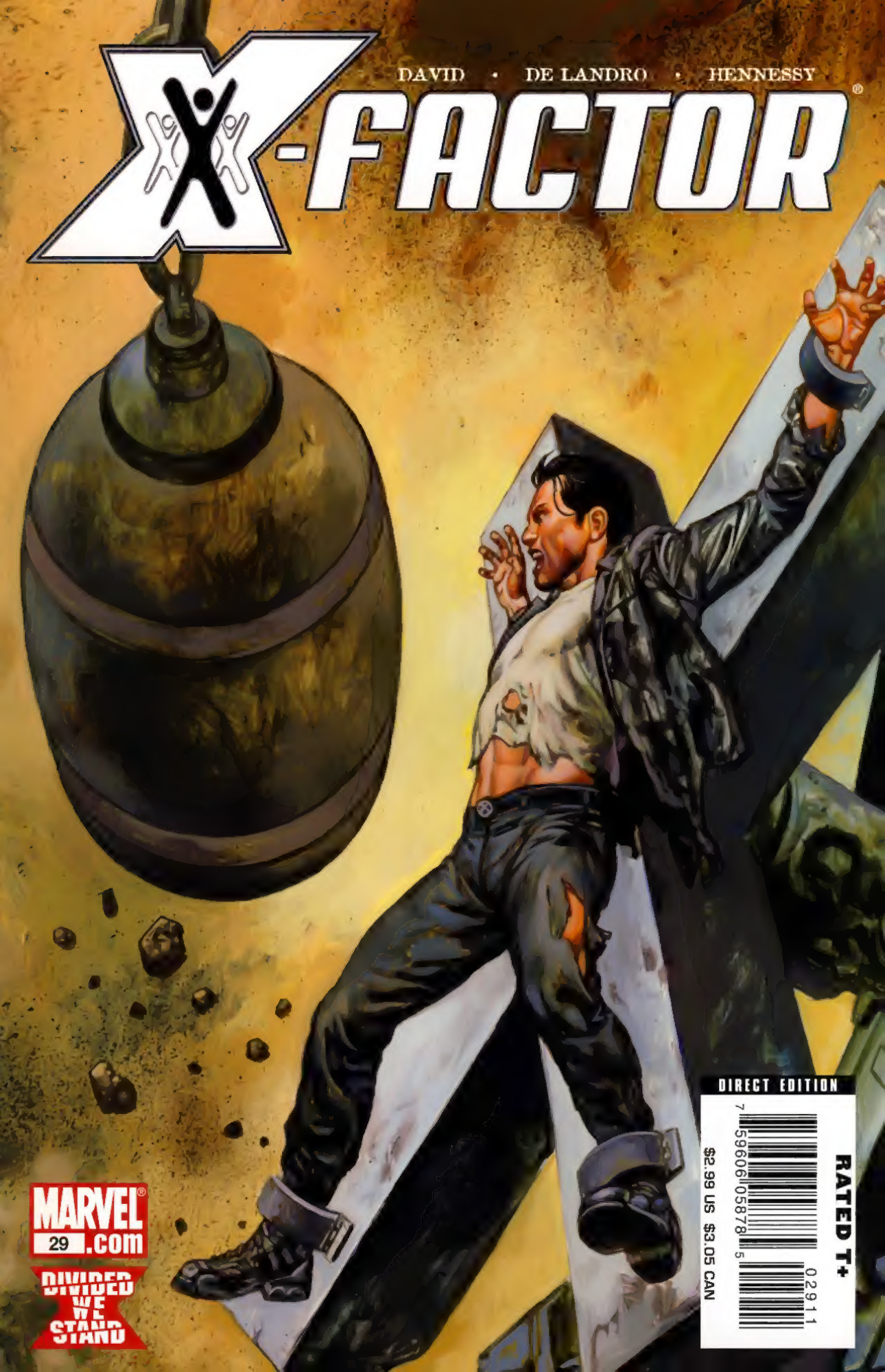
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IN A SOCIETY WHERE MUTANTS AND FORMER MUTANTS ALIKE FEEL THREATENED BY THE WORLD AROUND THEM, THEY TURN TO THEIR FIRST, BEST LINE OF DEFENSE WHENEVER TROUBLE ARISES: X-FACTOR, THE PRIVATE DETECTIVE AGENCY FOUNDED BY MADROX, THE MULTIPLE MAN.

X-FACTOR

PREVIOUSLY...

FOLLOWING THE EVENTS OF MESSIAH COMPLEX, X-FACTOR IS IN SHAMBLES: WOLFSBANE HAS DECIDED TO LEAVE THE TEAM TO JOIN X-FORCE, THOUGH SHE CAN'T TELL HER TEAMMATES WHERE SHE'S GOING. JAMIE IS LEFT SCARRED BOTH EMOTIONALLY AND PHYSICALLY FROM HIS TRIP TO AN ANTI-MUTANT FUTURE, AND LAYLA WAS LEFT STRANDED IN THAT VERY SAME FUTURE.

MEANWHILE, THE AREA FORMERLY KNOWN AS MUTANT TOWN IS GOING THROUGH A LOT OF CHANGES, WITH NEW BUSINESSES TAKING OVER EXISTING BUILDINGS, AND PEOPLE WHO WERE ONCE MUTANTS LEAVING IN DROVES. AS IF THAT WASN'T ENOUGH, SIRYN IS ALSO PREGNANT WITH MADROX'S BABY...AND JAMIE HAS NO IDEA.

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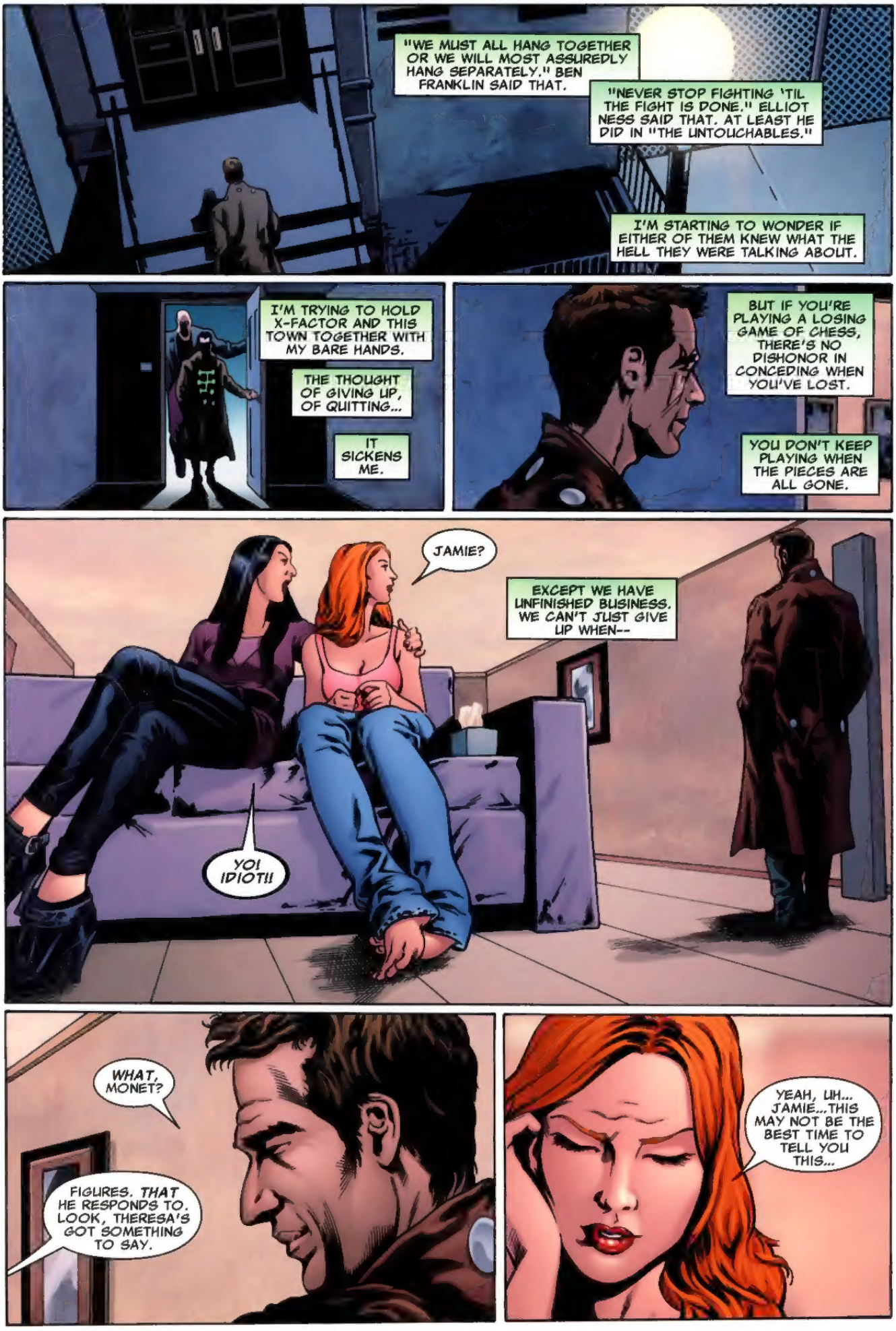
Dear Rictor,
By the time you read this, I'll be gone.
And I think it's important that you understand the reasons why I--
TO HELL WITH YOUR REASONS, SINCLAIR.
AND TO HELL WITH YOU.

YA THINK IT'S A SIGN, MADROX?
GUIDO...MY DETECTIVE ABILITIES MAY NOT BE UP THERE WITH SHERLOCK HOLMES, BUT EVEN I CAN TELL IT'S A SIGN. TWO SIGNS, IN FACT.
NOT THAT. I MEAN...
AMEDAY OVEMENTS
MAYBE IT'S A SIGN THAT WE SHOULD RETHINK THINGS.
THE POWER PLANT'S BEEN THE MIDDLE EAST SIDE'S WATERIN' HOLE SINCE FOREVER. IF EVEN THEY'RE PACKIN' IT IN...
THE "MIDDLE EAST SIDE"?
THAT'S WHAT THEY'RE CALLIN' MUTANT TOWN THESE DAYS. GUESS IT MAKES SENSE, WHAT WITH THE LACK OF...WHAT'S THE WORD...?
MUTANTS.
YEAH, THEM.
JAMIE, DID'JA THINK THAT MAYBE...?
NO.
I'M JUST SAYING THAT WE MIGHT DO MORE GOOD ELSEWH--
WE? ARE WE EVEN A "WE" ANYMORE?
YOU TOLD ME YOU WERE LEAVING. BECOMING SHERIFF OF MUTANT TOWN. WHAT HAPPENED WITH THAT?
I TOLD 'EM TO TAKE THE JOB AND SHOVE IT.

I TOLD VAL COOPER THAT I DIDN'T CARE HOW MUCH MONEY THEY THREW AT ME. BOTTOM LINE IS, I RECONSIDERED, AND I SAID...
"GUIDO CAROSELLA DON'T DESERT HIS FRIENDS, LADY. SO YOU JUST GO AND GET SOMEBODY ELSE, OKAY? DONE DEAL, END OF STORY."
MAN, YOU SHOULD'VE SEEN HER BEG AND PLEAD TO--
YOU DIDN'T TURN IT DOWN. THEY *WITHDREW* IT...PROBABLY BECAUSE THE DWINDLING NUMBER OF MUTANTS AND FORMER MUTANTS IN THE AREA MADE THE POST UNNECESSARY.
...
HOW'D'JA KNOW?
YOU MAKE REALLY BIG HAND GESTURES WHEN YOU LIE.
NERTS.


"WE MUST ALL HANG TOGETHER OR WE WILL MOST ASSUREDLY HANG SEPARATELY." BEN FRANKLIN SAID THAT.
"NEVER STOP FIGHTING 'TIL THE FIGHT IS DONE." ELLIOT NESS SAID THAT. AT LEAST HE DID IN "THE UNTOUCHABLES."
I'M STARTING TO WONDER IF EITHER OF THEM KNEW WHAT THE HELL THEY WERE TALKING ABOUT.
I'M TRYING TO HOLD X-FACTOR AND THIS TOWN TOGETHER WITH MY BARE HANDS.
THE THOUGHT OF GIVING UP, OF QUITTING...
IT SICKENS ME.
BUT IF YOU'RE PLAYING A LOSING GAME OF CHESS, THERE'S NO DISHONOR IN CONCEDING WHEN YOU'VE LOST.
YOU DON'T KEEP PLAYING WHEN THE PIECES ARE ALL GONE.
JAMIE?
EXCEPT WE HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS. WE CAN'T JUST GIVE UP WHEN--
YO! IDIOT!!
WHAT, MONET?
FIGURES. THAT HE RESPONDS TO. LOOK, THERESA'S GOT SOMETHING TO SAY.
YEAH, UH... JAMIE...THIS MAY NOT BE THE BEST TIME TO TELL YOU THIS...

GREAT. SHE'S QUITTING, TOO. FIRST RAHNE BOLTS, NOW THIS.
I KNEW IT. I KNEW THIS WAS COMING.
YOU... KNEW?
IF HE SAYS HE KNEW, I'D BELIEVE 'IM. HE'S GOT KILLER GUESSING MOVES THESE DAYS.
BUT...HOW COULD YOU TELL?
TRUST ME. IF NOTHING ELSE, IT WAS WRITTEN ALL OVER YOUR FACE.
WELL...HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT IT...?
HOW DO I...?
FOR CRYING OUT LOUD, THERESA, HOW DO YOU THINK I FEEL? THIS COULDN'T HAVE COME AT A WORSE TIME!
I KNOW OUR HISTORY HAS ITS UPS AND DOWNS, BUT GEEZ, I EXPECTED MORE FROM YOU!
MY GOD, JAMIE, WILL YOU LISTEN TO YOURSELF?
I MEAN, HONESTLY, I WAS HOPING YOU MIGHT BE SUPPORTIVE! AFTER ALL, YOU DID HAVE A LITTLE SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT!
RIGHT! SURE! BLAME IT ON ME!
WELL, WHO ELSE?!?
NOBODY ELSE! OF COURSE NOT! EVERYTHING IN THE WHOLE DAMNED WORLD IS MY FAULT!
HEY, MADROX. JUST WANTED TO SAY, I'M OUTTA HERE.
YEAH, FINE, RIC, SEE YOU LATER.
NO, YOU WON'T. I'M QUITTING.

RICTOR! HOLD UP!
DID YOU SEE THAT? DID YOU SEE THE WAY HE ACTED?
THIS SEEMED VAGUELY FAMILIAR TO ME. HOLD ON...
"BLAME IT ON ME!" HE'S THE FATHER, FOR GOD'S SAKE!
THE WAY YOU TWO WERE TALKING...IT'S SO FAMILIAR...
A LITTLE SYMPATHY FROM HIM! THAT'S ALL I WAS ASK--
GOT IT. "THREE'S COMPANY."
SNAP!
HUH?
IT WAS LIKE AN EPISODE OF "THREE'S COMPANY."
WHAT THE HELL IS "THREE'S COMPANY"?
AN OLD SITCOM. MOST EPISODES CENTERED AROUND TWO PEOPLE HAVING A MASSIVE MISUNDERSTANDING THAT COULD HAVE BEEN EASILY AVOIDED.
HUH?
STOP SAYING "HUH." YOU'RE PRACTICALLY HEMORRHAGING IQ.
SIRYN, OBVIOUSLY MADROX DIDN'T KNOW WHAT YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT.
BUT HE SAID HE--
HE WAS WRONG! HE'S WRONG A LOT! AND IF YOU WEREN'T BLINDED BY BEING IN LOVE WITH HIM, YOU'D REALIZE THAT!
I'M IN LOVE WITH HIM?
OBVIOUSLY. STILL.
NO...
YES.
AW, BUGGER.

RIC, HOLD UP A MINUTE. JUST WAI--
LEGGO, MAN, OR I SWEAR T'GOD--!
JUST EASE OFF, OKAY?! LET'S TALK THIS OVER...
AIN'T NOTHING TO TALK ABOUT. I'M JUST SICK OF MUTANT STUFF. HANGING OUT WITH MUTANTS. FIGHTING TO HELP MUTANTS SURVIVE. WORRYING ABOUT MUTANTS.
I'M NOT A MUTANT! NOT ANYMORE! I'M JUST ACTING LIKE SOME... SOME WEIRD MUTANT WANNABE!
I'M A NORMAL GUY, MADROX! MAYBE IT'S TIME I JUST STARTED LIVING A NORMAL LIFE!
AND RAHNE'S LEAVING HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS, RIGHT?
RIGHT.
MAN, YOU ARE SO FULL OF--
Y'KNOW WHAT? FINE. GO. LEAVE.
JAMIE, AINT'CHA GONNA--

AIN'T I GONNA WHAT? TRY TO MAKE HIM STAY WHEN HE'S OBVIOUSLY MISERABLE?
YOU WANT TO GO, RICTOR? GO.
I'M GONE.
VAYA CON DIOS.
DON'T SPEAK SPANISH. YOU SOUND LIKE AN IDIOT.
SLAM!
I ALWAYS READ THAT HUMANS ARE SOCIAL ANIMALS BY NATURE. BUT...I DON'T KNOW... MAYBE THAT'S JUST CRAP.
MAYBE WE'RE ACTUALLY LONERS BY NATURE, AND SOCIAL MERELY OF *NECESSITY* FOR *SURVIVAL*. AND SOMETIMES...
...BEING ALONE BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANYTHING...
...EVEN SURVIVAL.

¡DIOS SANTO--!
The Only Game in Town
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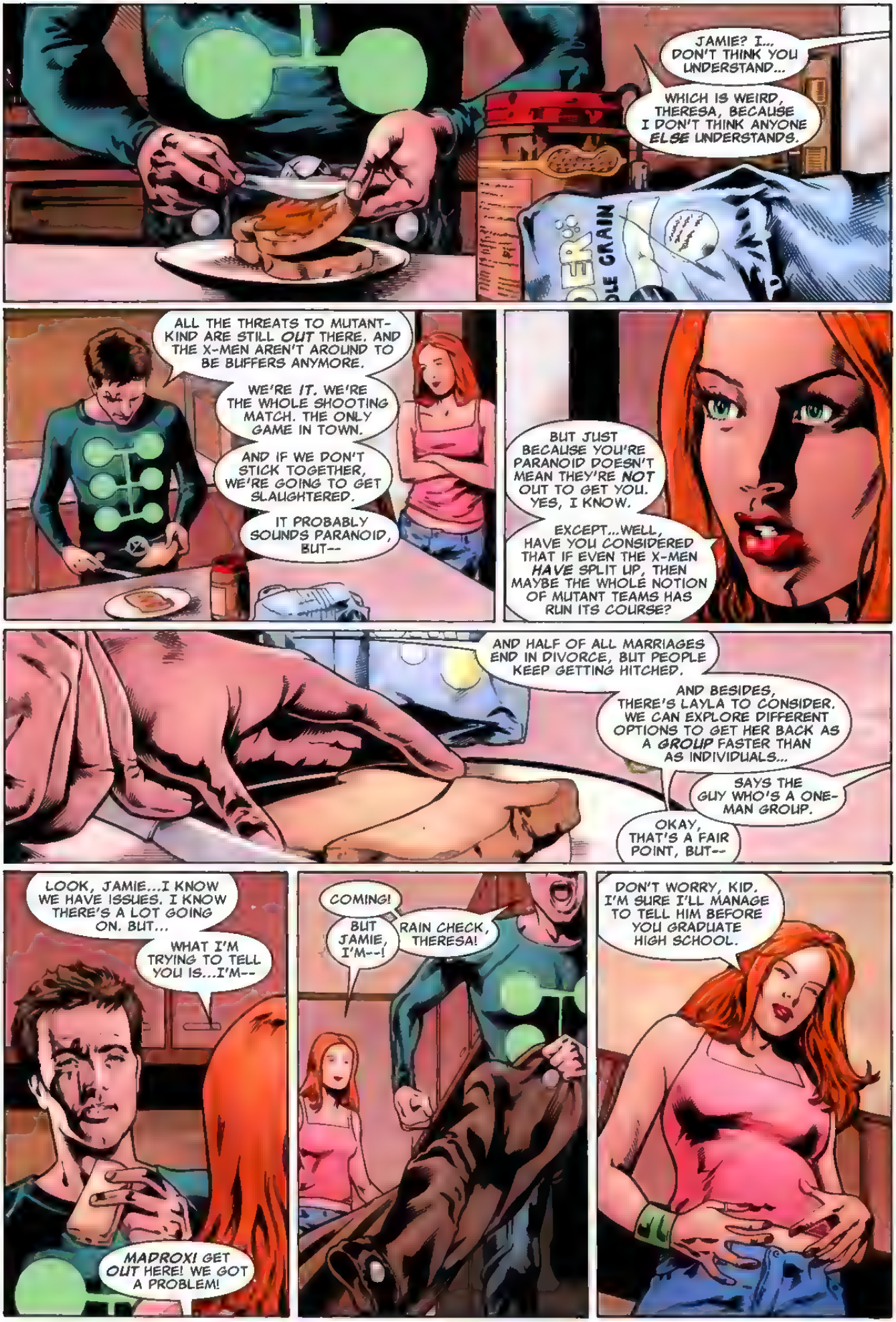
VC'S CORY PETIT LETTERER
AUBREY SITTERSON EDITOR
JOE QUESADA EDITOR IN CHIEF
DAN BUCKLEY PUBLISHER

AAAKKK!!!!
MADROX!!!!
HEELLLLLPPP!!!!
SOMEBODY!!!!

HEEEEELLLPPP--!
I KNEW YOU'D COME CRAWLIN' BACK.
CLOSE THE DOOR! BEFORE WE LOSE ALL THE AIR OR SOMETHING!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKIN' ABOUT?
WE'RE IN SPACE!
WE'RE IN WHAT NOW?
SPACE, MAN! THE FINAL FREAKIN' FRONTIER! JUST LOOK OUT THE--
UH...RIC? DON'T TAKE THIS WRONG, BUT...
YOU BEEN SMOKIN' SOMETHING?

THIS...THIS WAS ALL OUTER SPACE.
AND THE STEPS WERE GONE.
LOOK, RICTOR, IF YA CHANGED YOUR MIND, YA DON'T HAVE TO COME UP WITH SOME WHOLE--
I'M NOT MAKING THIS UP, GUIDO!
RIC, LOOK AROUND! WE'RE NOT IN OUTER SPACE.
I CAN SEE THAT! YOU THINK I CAN'T SEE THAT?
BUT IT WAS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT BEFORE!
OKAY. WHATEVER.
DON'T "WHATEVER" ME, MAN! I'M TELLING YOU--
RICTOR, JUST DROP IT, OKAY?
AHHHH--!!!
AW, NOW WHAT? WHAT ARE YA--?
HUNH...
OKAY. NOT GOOD.


JAMIE? I... DON'T THINK YOU UNDERSTAND...
WHICH IS WEIRD, THERESA, BECAUSE I DON'T THINK ANYONE ELSE UNDERSTANDS.
ALL THE THREATS TO MUTANT-KIND ARE STILL OUT THERE. AND THE X-MEN AREN'T AROUND TO BE BUFFERS ANYMORE.
WE'RE IT. WE'RE THE WHOLE SHOOTING MATCH. THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN.
AND IF WE DON'T STICK TOGETHER, WE'RE GOING TO GET SLAUGHTERED.
IT PROBABLY SOUNDS PARANOID, BUT--
BUT JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE PARANOID DOESN'T MEAN THEY'RE NOT OUT TO GET YOU. YES, I KNOW.
EXCEPT...WELL, HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THAT IF EVEN THE X-MEN HAVE SPLIT UP, THEN MAYBE THE WHOLE NOTION OF MUTANT TEAMS HAS RUN ITS COURSE?
AND HALF OF ALL MARRIAGES END IN DIVORCE, BUT PEOPLE KEEP GETTING HITCHED.
AND BESIDES, THERE'S LAYLA TO CONSIDER. WE CAN EXPLORE DIFFERENT OPTIONS TO GET HER BACK AS A GROUP FASTER THAN AS INDIVIDUALS...
SAYS THE GUY WHO'S A ONE-MAN GROUP.
OKAY, THAT'S A FAIR POINT, BUT--
LOOK, JAMIE...I KNOW WE HAVE ISSUES. I KNOW THERE'S A LOT GOING ON. BUT...
WHAT I'M TRYING TO TELL YOU IS...I'M--
MADROX! GET OUT HERE! WE GOT A PROBLEM!
COMING!
BUT JAMIE, I'M--!
RAIN CHECK, THERESA!
DON'T WORRY, KID. I'M SURE I'LL MANAGE TO TELL HIM BEFORE YOU GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL.

--AND THE NEXT SECOND, POOF. GONE.
MEBBE HE WAS, I DUNNO...BEAMED AWAY. OR SOME SUPERSPEEDSTER GRABBED HIM.
OCCAM'S RAZOR, GUIDO.
YA THINK HE WENT TO GET A SHAVE?
NOOO... IT MEANS THE SIMPLEST EXPLANATION--
--TENDS TO BE THE CORRECT ONE. TRAP DOOR.
IN THE SIDEWALK?
WOULDN'T BE THE WEIRDEST THING WE'VE EVER SEEN.
GOOD POINT. OKAY, THEN--
KRUNCH
YA REALIZE THEY'RE PROB'LY GONNA SEND US A BILL FOR THIS.
NO RISK TOO GREAT.
THERE'S SOMETHING DOWN HERE, ALL RIGHT.
WANT ME TO RUN BACK, GET A FLASHLIGHT?
GOT ONE. ALWAYS CARRY ONE, TO BE PREPARED. ONE OF MY DUPES WAS A SCOUTMASTER FOR A YEAR.
YEAH, I WAS IN THE SCOUTS WHEN I WAS A KID. I NEVER GOT MY "CLIMB INTO DARK HOLES" MERIT BADGE THOUGH.

THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT I WAS TALKING ABOUT. WE CAN'T LET OUR GUARD DOWN EVEN FOR A SECOND.
WE CAN'T QUIT BECAUSE THEY WILL NEVER QUIT. THERE WILL ALWAYS BE MORE OF THEM, AND MORE...
...TRYING TO DESTROY US...
...FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN THAT WE EXIST.
THEN AGAIN...WHAT OTHER REASON HAS ANYONE EVER NEEDED TO DESTROY OTHERS?
GEORGE MALLORY WAS ONCE ASKED WHY HE WANTED TO CLIMB MOUNT EVEREST. HE SAID, "BECAUSE IT'S THERE." SAME PRINCIPLE.
SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER MALLORY'S BODY WAS FINALLY FOUND ON EVEREST.
THERE'S A LESSON IN THERE SOMEWHERE.
WHAT THE HELL...?

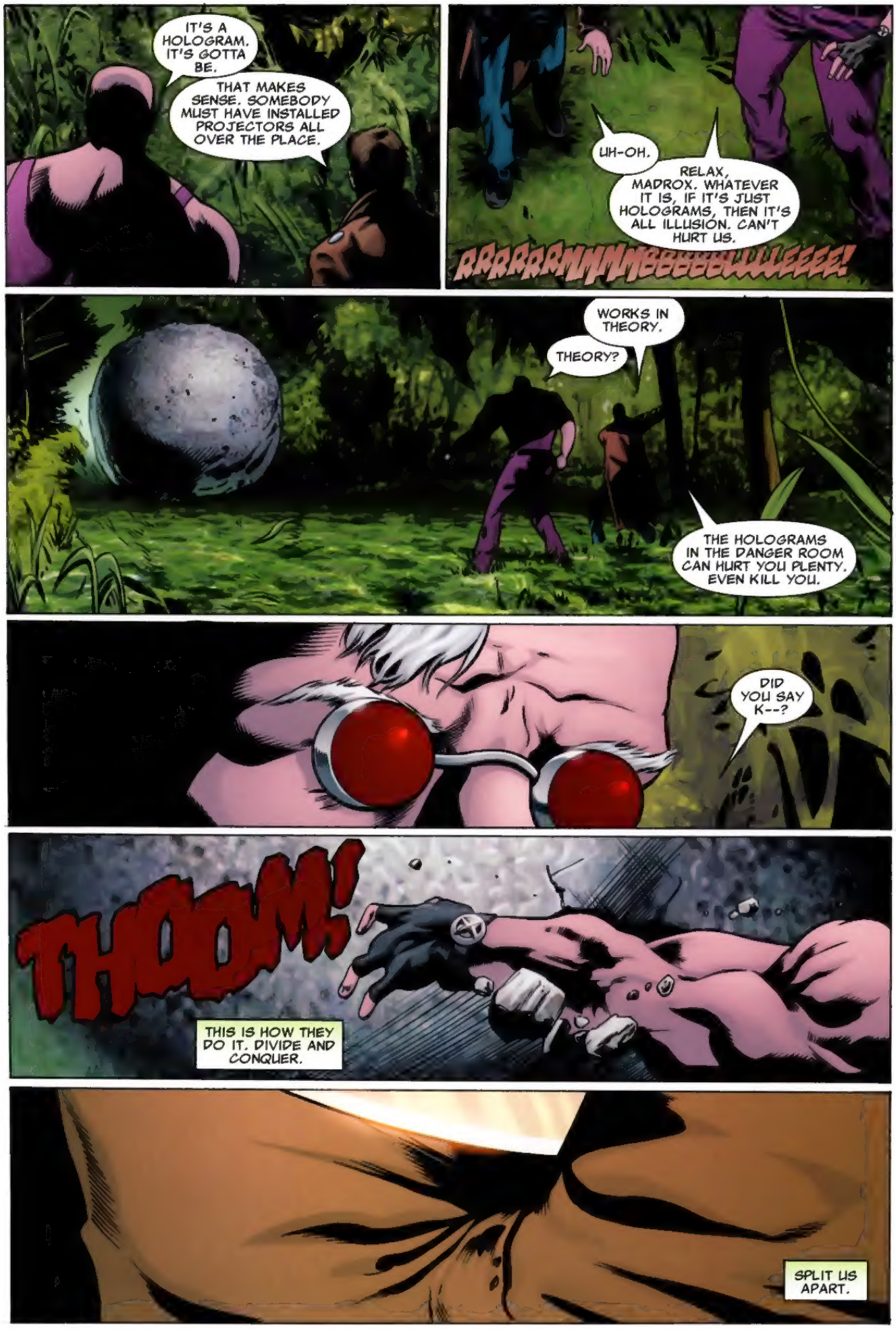
GIVE ME A GUN. LET ME JUST SHOOT HIM.
NOW, NOW... WHERE'S THE ARTISTRY IN THAT? THE STYLE? THE FUN?
DEVIL TAKE YOUR GAMES! I'M THE CLIENT!
AND I'M THE ONE YOU HIRED TO EXECUTE YOUR DESIRES, SO ALLOW ME TO DO MY JOB AS I SEE FIT.
EHH...?
WHAT...?
OH, YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING ME!!!

HELLO, MR. RICTOR.
GO TO HELL!!!
OH, WHAT'S THE MATTER? FEELING A LITTLE CROSS?
COME OUT FROM WHEREVER YOU'RE HIDING AND YOU'LL FEEL MY RIGHT CROSS!
COME ON... YOU HAVE TO ADMIRE THIS JUST A LITTLE. I WAS READING POE WHILE WATCHING "GOLDFINGER" AND CAME UP WITH THIS DEVICE.
ASK ME IF I EXPECT YOU TO TALK. GO AHEAD. IT'LL BE FUN.
BITE ME!
AH ME. BANTER IS BECOMING A LOST ART. I THINK SPIDER-MAN IS THE ONLY LIVING PRACTITIONER THESE DAYS.
MONET
MONET!!

THIS IS RIDICULOUS. WHO COULD HAVE POSSIBLY--
WHAT THE--? MONET! WHERE ARE--
I HEAR HIM!
SHE *HEARS* HIM? HOW DOES SHE--
SIRYN! GO AFTER HER! AND TAKE ME WITH YOU FOR BACKUP!
STAMP!
SCREEEEEEEEE!
DO NOT WORRY, RICTOR! WE SHALL FIND YOU! FIND YOU AND PUNISH THE MISCREANTS WHO HAVE DONE THIS FOUL DEED!

OKAY, THEY'RE ON THE CASE. WE SHOULD GET THIS SORTED OUT BEFORE L--
UH... MADROX...
AW, SWELL.

I HOPE YOU APPRECIATE THE TECHNOLOGY, RICTOR. IT'S CUTTING EDGE.
OHHH, THAT WAS CLOSE. ARE YOU GOING TO SCREAM, RICTOR? MY EMPLOYER WOULD REALLY *LIKE* TO HEAR YOU SCREAM.
AH. GOING TO TOUGH IT OUT. YOU CERTAINLY HAVE *COJONES*...
...FOR ANOTHER FEW SECONDS, ANYWAY.


IT'S A HOLOGRAM. IT'S GOTTA BE.
THAT MAKES SENSE. SOMEBODY MUST HAVE INSTALLED PROJECTORS ALL OVER THE PLACE.
UH-OH.
RELAX, MADROX. WHATEVER IT IS, IF IT'S JUST HOLOGRAMS, THEN IT'S ALL ILLUSION. CAN'T HURT US.
RRRRRRMMMMEEEEEEWWWEEEE!
WORKS IN THEORY.
THEORY?
THE HOLOGRAMS IN THE DANGER ROOM CAN HURT YOU PLENTY. EVEN KILL YOU.
DID YOU SAY K--?
THOOM!
THIS IS HOW THEY DO IT. DIVIDE AND CONQUER.
SPLIT US APART.

BECAUSE UNLIKE THE HEROES... THE VILLAINS DON'T SEEM TO KNOW THE MEANING OF THE WORD "QUIT."
THE SAME ONES JUST KEEP COMING BACK AGAIN AND AGAIN, HOPING TO WEAR US DOWN, LIKE WATER DRIPPING ON A ROCK.
AND WORST OF ALL...
GAMEDAY IS HERE!
XOXO ARCADE
...THEY JUST LOVE LETTING YOU KNOW IT WAS THEM.

Megan
MINUTEMEN
Scans by Dizzy